

**OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE
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**CONTACT: 99 - 28
JAY ZIEGLER
HELAIN KLASKY
AMY STILWELL
(202) 395-3230**

**United States Calls for Continued Access to Japanese Rice Market
Consistent with Current Levels**

United States Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky issued the following statement as a result of actions the Government of Japan is taking to modify its rice import regime. On December 21, the Government of Japan notified the WTO that it would reform its rice import regime by imposing tariffs on rice imports that exceed Japan's WTO minimum access commitment.

"In light of the impressive efforts by the U.S. rice industry to meet the demands of the Japanese market, we have held a number of discussions with the Japanese Government to examine the effects of its new policies on market access for rice," Ambassador Barshefsky stated. "Through these talks, we have made it clear that we expect the U.S. rice industry to achieve continued access to Japan's rice market in line with that of the past four years. We will work with Japan in 1999 and beyond to that end, and we will closely monitor Japan's rice purchases. If circumstances change, we reserve the right to consider *all* of our options to respond to Japan's rice policy, including the WTO. At the same time, the United States and Japan plan to hold periodic consultations on a number of agricultural issues, including access to Japan's rice market. As a result of these discussions, we have decided not to object to Japan's new rice import regime in the WTO at this time."